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CIA Director Defends Staff Cutbacks

CIA Director Stansfield Turner yesterday defended his controversial cutbacks in the Central Intelligence Agency's clandestine service while acknowledging that they have shaken morale.

"Clearly there is a morale problem when you ask 212 persons to leave," Turner told reporters on Capitol Hill yesterday following a secret briefing for the Senate Intelligence Committee. "I feel like a football coach with too many good players on the team."

At the same time, Turner said he was "very disappointed" in former CIA for censorship and clearance bethorized account of the final period of the Vietnam war, a book called "Decent Interval" just published by Random House.

In the book, Snepp charges that the American evacuation of South Vietnam in April, 1975, was a chaotic disaster brought on by major U.S. intelligence failures in Saigon and Washington. Snepp, 34, said that he decided not to submit his manuscript to the CIA for cnesorship and clearance because the CIA had made selective leaks to the press in order to "whitewash his role" in the evacuation.

Turner said Snepp had violated his written oath of secrecy as a CIA officer and also broken a personal promise to Turner to submit his manuscript for review. "He let me down," the CIA director said, adding that he was searching for ways to tighten security and to emphasize to CIA employes that they must heed their oath.

As for the substance of Snepp's allegations, Turner said that "in my view, Mr. Snepp was not in a position of sufficient authority to be a good judge of decisions made by the State Department, the Defense Department and the CIA in Washington and in Saigon." Snepp, who spent five years in the CIA's Saigon station, had been the agency's principal analyst of North Vietnamese political affairs.

There has been speculation that some of the 816 CIA officials cut or about to be cut from the agency's roster might be embittered enough to make public some of their inside knowledge, but Turner said he had "deep confidence in the loyalty and patriotism of the persons who have worked for us." He said the only problems of public disaffection have come from employes "who have left us on their own," such as Snepp and former CIA officers Philip Agee and John Stockwell.